

Lincoln. h. 220. Wh. h. 227.

SCHOOL^{AND} HOME EDUCATION

DEVOTED TO

THE INTERESTS OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

FEBRUARY, 1909.

THE EDITOR'S EDUCATIONAL SURVEY.

201-206

Education and Religion.—Teaching English Grammar.—Theodore Roosevelt.

DISCUSSIONS AND REPORTS.

Public School Libraries of Oregon E. F. Carleton 207

*Some Features of the New Jersey Public School
System* C. J. Baxter 209

The Uses and Results of Dramatization Ethel L. Quinlan 211

Why Need English Composition be a Bugbear? Margaret H. J. Lampe 214

MATERIALS OF TEACHING

George Alfred Brown 220-227

The Intellectual Training of Lincoln.—Use of History Pageants in Education.—A
Recitation in Grammar.

LITERARY ARTICLES.

A Study of Mountain Ranges. F. M. Fultz 227

COMMENT.

233-238

Plan for the Denver Meeting of the N. E. A.—Form N. E. A. Parties for Denver, July
5 to 9.—University Extension.—The Illinois Schoolmasters' Club.—Lincolniana.—
Superintendents to Meet at Chicago.—J. L. McBrien's New Work.—Book Table.—
Editorial Mention and Business Notices.—The Magazines.—New Books.



BLOOMINGTON, ILL.

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PUBLIC-SCHOOL PUBLISHING COMPANY

Entered as Second-Class Mail Matter at Bloomington, Illinois
Published Monthly except July and August.

Volume XXVIII, No. 6.
Whole Number, 300

Terms: 15 Cents a Number
\$1.25 a Year



MATERIALS OF TEACHING

A Department Devoted to Discussions and Reports of Schoolroom Work and of Sources of Experience and Opportunities for Expression Available in Teaching. ❖ Conducted by GEO. ALFRED BROWN



THE INTELLECTUAL TRAINING OF LINCOLN.

It is the special problem of public school education to determine how intellectual training may be given so as to best develop human life. Hints of value to the school may be found in the experience of men who have sought such training after school age. Abraham Lincoln is one whose efforts were remarkably successful. We have some most interesting records of the studies and training he imposed upon himself. We know that his mother stimulated in him an early appreciation of the use of language especially as a means through which to develop the humorous side of experiences by happy comparisons or aptly illustrative stories. His step-mother with a little help from some schooling encouraged him to read thoughtfully. This, undoubtedly, helped to keep his mind so singularly free as it was from narrow prejudices and short-sighted ambitions. Self-reliant and kindly natured, he always maintained the relations of vigorous honesty and fair dealing with all about him. He lived in times and surroundings which required the members of the community to maintain for themselves, largely, the social and political standards of life that seemed essential. Society was, indeed, going to school to itself in a much more direct way than can now be the case, and its members were called upon to debate

questions, each for himself, which in the end society must determine by constitutional provisions of the state and nation, or by local regulations of the community.

Lincoln, as a boy in Indiana, read every book he could obtain. These were mostly of that literature which touches vividly the main springs of human life, such as "Aesop's Fables," "Pilgrim's Progress," the Bible, and "Robinson Crusoe." One of his favorites also was Weems' "Life of Washington." The thoughtful boy was helped by the wisdom of these books to decide for himself some questions that society about him still in the elemental stage of organization had not definitely answered for itself. In 1820 there were yet a few slaves held in Indiana where the sentiment of local communities permitted it. Only a very few men were prepared to think clearly on the limitations of legislative functions secured by constitutional rights. In his own community of Gentryville, Indiana, it was the boy Lincoln who started public discussion of such fundamental topics as "Temperance" and "Union and the Constitution." When he was about eighteen years of age he read eagerly and with much insight the "Revised Laws of Indiana," a book containing in addition to those laws, the "Declaration of Independence," the "Constitution of the United States," the "Constitution of

Indiana," and the "Ordinances of 1787." Such reading was very different from the forms of allegory and fable which were so attractive to Lincoln. Yet he not only mastered an understanding of the legal phraseology, but sought forms of translation for the ideas he gained which, as he tells us, would enable him "to put an idea in language plain enough for any boy I knew to comprehend."

Such endeavors, during his boyhood and youth, enabled Lincoln to become a popular companion. When young manhood, however, brought ambitions for the accomplishment of definite ends, he came to feel the need of a systematic knowledge of language, and later of some of the definite forms of reasoning. Lincoln seems to have been able to acquire facts from subjects of study and from the experience of others with great readiness and in a way to give him power to use them. With very little schooling he was the best speller in the neighborhood, wrote a good hand, and was proficient in arithmetic. From but little reading in history he obtained a clear conception of the course of human events. On the basis of this preparation Lincoln, at twenty-one, sought to make his own way in life. A story, connected with one of his first ventures, is characteristic of the effect of contact with social life in arousing definite aims toward which to direct any influence he might exert with the people: When in New Orleans it is reported that on visiting the slave market, he exclaimed, "If I ever get a chance to hit this thing, I'll hit it hard." Whether this particular incident ever occurred or not, we know

that Lincoln was soon doing his part to form a more definite public opinion among the people of New Salem, Illinois, on questions of union and of popular government. When about twenty-two years of age he decided to prepare himself for public life. This was only a year before the South Carolina Nullification Acts and John C. Calhoun's resolution in the United States Senate to the effect that the constitution is a compact between single states; each state being the final judge for itself as to the powers delegated to the general government. The question out of which this South Carolina conflict arose was that of the tariff, the merits of which Abraham Lincoln could not be expected to discuss very intelligently at that time. But nullification struck at a fundamental principle of union and of national life which thoughtful men must make clear to themselves and to the people everywhere.

Undoubtedly Lincoln formed the purpose of entering public life because he saw the need of wise leadership and felt his own power of insight, and judgment of principles, and not simply because he found himself popular and able, through his gifts as a story-teller, to secure a following. Had popularity alone attracted him he would not have felt the need of the more serious preparation. To lead men in their thinking so that they will form sound conclusions for themselves is a different task from that of swaying their feelings and securing a personal following. Language must be used exactly and according to its own laws of definite expression if it is to be used as a means for the demonstration of ideas. Lin-

coln knew that he possessed the less exacting power of rhetorical speech. He determined to study grammar, we may assume, because he desired power for the higher leadership of thinking men.

Lincoln's feeling of need for the study of grammar was not easily supplied. Even the schoolmaster of the little village did not own a book on the subject, but he knew of a man living six miles away who did, and Lincoln walking that six miles was able to borrow and afterwards to buy this grammar. Probably no one in the village was competent to judge how well the lessons of the book were learned at the time, though the effectiveness of his study is now apparent to all who read the masterly constructed sentences of his speeches.

Lincoln sought election to the state legislature before he had begun the study of law. With characteristic straightforwardness he printed, in an address announcing his candidacy, an outline of laws he would advocate that concerned local needs. This outline, however, shows an entirely inadequate conception of law making and law enforcing. He proposes a law against usury intended to be evaded in extreme cases, but otherwise enforced, and a law for a practically impossible scheme of local improvement. His own neighborhood supported him, but he was defeated in the district. Within a few months chance threw a volume of "Blackstone's Commentaries" into Lincoln's way, and he became an earnest student of law. His previous experience of reading the "Revised Laws of Indiana" had probably brought to his notice some very crude legislation,

not much better, perhaps, than the attempts made by himself in that first political announcement of his. Now he was able to discover in Blackstone principles that should guide all legal practice.

It is characteristic of Lincoln that very early in his reading of law he should discover the fundamental fallacy of legal pleading in that it seeks to establish a case rather than to demonstrate truth. He had himself tried to propose a law that should work or not work depending on the needs of the community, but now he sought principles and a basis for reasoning. He went to the schoolmaster with the question of how one can know when a proposition is demonstrated. The schoolmaster could only refer him to a study of Euclid as a means of finding an answer to his question. Thus Lincoln came to another disciplinary study of the school, and is reported to have mastered geometry before he proceeded with his law studies. He also took up, as a means of livelihood, the work of deputy county surveyor, and mastered the use of definite mathematical formulas in the subdivision of land.

This training of the mind to follow laws of expression in language and of accurate reasoning in thought, which Lincoln gave himself by the study of the usual school texts, seems to have helped him to take almost at once a leading position among the best thinkers in his community. It certainly was the training which would enable him to demonstrate conclusively the great political problems of his time concerning the relation of the states to the

Union, and of the principles of self-government to the constitution. That the nation could not exist half slave and half free was a mathematical certainty whether politicians realized it or not. The national conscience must be a unit on such a fundamental axiom of human relationship. The local governments of the states could not be in conflict with the principles of government embodied in the constitution. Therefore, state sovereignty must acknowledge the right of the nation to determine, through the voice of a majority of the people, the principles essential to the common good. It was to maintain this proposition, that the nation is in fact a government "of the people, for the people, by the people," that Lincoln held steadfastly to the prosecution of the war.

It is the purpose of this discussion to consider the relation of the discipline of school studies to the highest development of power. The school has often assumed that these disciplines might be forced on the minds of children without much reference to a feeling of need on the part of the children, or an attempt to develop an appreciation of results through the exercise of increased powers. Where the external conditions of life bring about the feeling of need and offer opportunities for development through use, as in the case of Lincoln, there is no doubt of the value of these studies. Modern school methods seek to so present the subject matter as to get the interested attention to the need which may be supplied by the study, and to exercise the power as it is acquired. This work is often open to criticism because interest is allowed to turn to the exercise

of the power as it is rather than directed toward maintaining attention to the discipline needed for its further development. In order that the discipline may be effective the course of study must be arranged so that each such subject will be given when the children are of the right maturity and when they will have opportunity to continue the use of the power developed. With Lincoln grammar was a college study, and geometry a part of his professional school course, if we classify the work by the age and experience of the man. The well organized school should, however, make these disciplines of value at an earlier age. Some observations of school work made this month and which in part suggested the above discussion are reported below.

USE OF HISTORY PAGEANTS IN EDUCATION.

Teachers and students in a number of the schools of Indianapolis are working out, under the leadership of Miss Charity Dye, a new body of material of special educative value in the schools. The purpose of the work is "to teach consecutive thinking." This requires in the final result correct expression through oral and written speech. It is to be accomplished with children by beginning with simple situations of life which call into play the creative imagination as a means of seeing the personal relations involved. The work seems to be based on the doctrine of Froebke that the child lives at first only in the world of direct human relations. It is in regard to these relations as they may be presented de-

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